

The Situation of Roma in Selected Western European Countries

*Report to the OSCE Conference
on Anti-Semitism and on other Forms of Intolerance
Cordoba, Spain, June 8-9, 2005*

June 2005

**Report by the
International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights
(IHF)**

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PREFACE

This report was prepared for the Conference on Anti-Semitism and on other Forms of Intolerance organized by the Slovene Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on June 8-9, 2005 in Cordoba, Spain.

The purpose of this report is to raise awareness about the human rights situation of Roma in four countries; Greece, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK). The IHF has chosen to focus on the rights of Roma in these countries because it wishes to raise more awareness about problems faced by Roma in Western Europe, a topic often neglected in discussions on human rights violations, intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE region.

The report discusses intolerance and discrimination against Roma in different areas: employment and education, housing, health, violence and relations with law enforcement authorities. Due to recent anti-Roma media reporting in the UK, the report also covers, more thoroughly, the media situation and political tendencies in that country. Most of the fields and issues are interlinked and therefore addressed in an integrated manner.

The report is primarily based on information and statements by Roma and anti-racist groups, material published by human rights organizations and monitoring bodies, research findings, media reports and official governmental documents. The report should not be understood as comprehensive, but rather as a contribution to the highly complicated debate surrounding the integration of the Roma minority in European societies. While it highlights the Roma situation in sectoral fields in Greece, Italy, Sweden and the UK specifically, it also reflects the problems faced by Roma in Western European countries in general.

The report was prepared in cooperation with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Greek Helsinki Monitor (on Greece) and the Swedish Helsinki Committee (on Sweden).

INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Roma remain to date the most deprived ethnic group of Europe. Disproportionately affected by poverty and discriminated against in employment, education, health care, administrative and other services, they face considerable obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Roma situation in Central and Eastern Europe has attracted relatively much attention in recent years, partly due to the enlargement process of the European Union, with less attention being directed at the Roma situation in Western Europe. However, also in these countries most Roma continue to suffer from prejudice and discrimination.¹ Programs and projects for Roma integration exist in several Western European countries, but they have not been successful in terms of content and, even less, in their implementation. Existing government policies have failed to address adequately discrimination against the Roma and to promote their social inclusion.² It is of considerable concern that measures at the local level remain largely insufficient, irrespective of the wide body of existing recommendations and commitments undertaken at governmental level.

In certain respects, the Roma situation appears to have deteriorated in recent years, partly due to an increased climate of intolerance. A new wave of anti Roma-attitudes appears to be emerging in Western Europe, with media speculation about large scale immigration of Roma from Eastern Europe following the enlargement of the European Union.³ The treatment of Roma is today among the most pressing human rights issues facing Europe.⁴

¹ Council of Europe, *Preliminary report on the Human Rights situation of the Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Europe*, Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005, p.5, available at: <http://www.coe.int>

² European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.1, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

³ Council of Europe, *Preliminary report on the Human Rights situation of the Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Europe*, Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005, p.6, available at: <http://www.coe.int>

⁴ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.9, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

The Roma is a large heterogeneous minority, whose members live in different countries under different circumstances. It is important to mention that not all the issues raised in this report affect all Roma in Europe, or all the Roma in the chosen countries. The IHF is aware that the choice of terminology in this report does not do justice to the great internal diversity of the Roma communities in Europe. However, practical and linguistic reasons force the use of the term “Roma” to refer to different Roma communities in this report. In addition, the term “Traveler” refers both to the traveling Roma and Sinti as well as the distinct Traveler minority in Ireland and the United Kingdom who are not Roma of origin, but whose nomadic life-style make them share many problems in common with the traveling Roma.

This report examines and discusses the Roma situation in Greece, Italy, Sweden and the UK. The countries are chosen to ensure geographical diversity and to cover different types of problems facing Roma in Western Europe. Greece and Italy have been chosen because these countries have large Roma populations, which live in poverty and segregation from the majority society. Sweden has the largest number of Roma of the Nordic Countries. Although Sweden has a comparatively good human rights record, its treatment of its Roma population remains a source of concern. Finally, the Roma/Traveler situation in the UK is worrying, with hostile public debate and media reporting. The IHF wishes to emphasize that the selection of the countries in no way implies that the problems faced by Roma are fewer or less serious in other Western European countries. Similarly, the length of a chapter or the discussion related to a particular sectoral field does not indicate the gravity of IHF’s concern but rather reflects differences in the availability of information.

Roma suffer from widespread economic, social and political marginalization. They have low levels of education, face discrimination and intolerant attitudes in everyday life and often live segregated from the majority population. The IHF argues that the fight against Roma-discrimination and work for integration is not only necessary for the respect of human rights of the individuals concerned, but a prerequisite for democratic and stable development of any society.⁵ The IHF recognizes that integration always is a two-way process, which involves commitment on both sides. Thus, successful integration of the Roma minority in Europe naturally also requires that the members of this minority take active efforts to adjust and participate in the societies in which they live.

⁵ Council of Europe, *Preliminary report on the Human Rights situation of the Roma, Sinti and Travellers in Europe*, Mr Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005, p.11, available at: <http://www.coe.int>

Against the background of the discussion in this report, the IHF would like to make the following recommendations:

1. States with Roma populations should recognize Roma as an ethnic minority if they have not yet done so. Also, if they have not yet done so, they should ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Charter on Regional and Minority Languages, two standard-setting Council of Europe instruments.
2. States should increase their efforts to prevent all forms of direct and indirect discrimination against Roma. States should ensure that anti-discrimination legislation in place in their countries fully corresponds to international standards and that it is effectively implemented at all levels of society.
3. States should raise awareness among local authorities of the importance of taking into particular consideration the needs of Roma in the development of land use and housing policies. They should take effective measures to prevent and remedy discrimination against Roma in access to public and private housing and should ensure that any policies encouraging segregating Roma communities in settlements are terminated and Roma who live in settlements should be offered alternative accommodation on equal terms with other individuals.
4. States with traveling Roma populations should ensure that a sufficient number of adequate camping sites are available to these communities. They should also ensure that sanctions for camping on unauthorized sites are proportionate to the damage caused by this offense.
5. States should ensure that discriminatory attitudes do not impede access of Roma to public health services, and that Roma patients receive equal treatment with other patients. In those countries where this is an issue, Roma who currently do not have access to public health care services because they lack personal documentation should be assisted in acquiring the required documentation.

6. National legislation should provide for effective protection against discrimination in the field of employment, and such legislation must be effectively implemented. Special measures should be taken to promote the recruitment of Roma, particularly within public administration. Deficiencies in the educational level of Roma, caused by unequal access to education, must be remedied through training and retraining programs.
7. Measures should be taken to remove legal and bureaucratic obstacles that contribute to school non-attendance and drop-outs among Roma children, such as lack of identity documents and residence permits. Efforts should be taken to raise awareness of the importance of education among Roma communities within which the level of educational participation has traditionally been low.
8. Where segregated education for Roma children still exists in one form or another, it should be replaced by regular integrated education. Adequate resources should be made available for the provision of pre-school education, language training and school assistant training in order to ensure the success of desegregation efforts. Access to adequate education must be ensured for Roma children and youth living in isolated settlements, through, for instance, the provision of transportation to regular schools. Efforts should also be taken to introduce instruction to Roma children in their own language, and their curricula should include instruction on their own history and culture.
9. Racially-motivated violence against Roma must be condemned at the highest political level, and sanctions for such violence must be commensurate with the severity of the acts. Allegations of improper police behavior against Roma, including excessive use of force, must be effectively investigated and prosecuted. Special emphasis must be placed on examining whether racial profiling has played a role in cases of police abuse against Roma. Judicial professionals should be trained to better recognize racially motivated crimes and to regard racial motivation as an aggravating circumstance, which carries a heavier penalty.
10. States should take effective measures to encourage and support Roma participation in political life and other national decision making procedures, and especially their

participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of policy measures addressing issues of relevance to Roma, in particular by promoting representation of Roma at all levels of public administration. Law-enforcement authorities should be provided with regular training on human rights law including anti-discrimination legislation. Such training should also provide information about minority cultures.

11. States should take effective measures to promote tolerance among their citizens and should develop awareness raising campaigns to this end. Political leaders should refrain from any statements that may contribute to intolerant attitudes toward Roma and debate should be encouraged within media about their responsibility to avoid perpetuating prejudice when reporting on Roma communities. Any propaganda of hatred, discrimination or violence against Roma, whether spread through media or other means, should be sanctioned to the fullest extent of the law.⁶

⁶ See Articles 4 and 6 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

GREECE

Greece does not recognize Roma as a minority and the Greek government does not accept the concept of minority rights. Many Roma in Greece live in substandard housing conditions and are unable to claim health and welfare rights. There is a high level of Roma hostility and police brutality. Roma suffer from social, political and economical discrimination.

It is difficult to provide an accurate assessment of the size of the Roma population in Greece since there are no census figures, and only rough estimates as to their number can be made. Different estimations have been presented by various state and non-state bodies. While the Greek state has given estimations ranging from 60-300,000, Greek Helsinki Monitor estimates there are approximately 300,000 to 350,000 Roma living in Greece. This would make Roma the largest indigenous minority of Greece, constituting about 3 to 4 % of the total population.

Greece does not recognize Roma as a minority group. The approximately 10,000 Muslim Roma who live in Western Thrace are held to be a constituent part of the only minority recognized by the Greek state under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, namely the “Muslim Minority of Western Thrace”.

Housing

About half the Roma in Greece live segregated from non-Roma in substandard housing conditions, in violation of the explicit ban on racial segregation provided by international law.⁷ In addition, Roma suffer from forced evictions which frequently take place and have been consistently reported by local organizations.⁸ In general it can be said, that in most of the cases of forced evictions, they are conducted by municipalities often with the tolerance of local police even when they are blatantly illegal.⁹ In an effort to prevent bad publicity, such evictions are often termed “cleaning operations”. The European Commission against Racism

⁷ International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2004 (Events of 2003)*, 2004, p.195, available at: www.ihf-hr.org

⁸ The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), *Forced Evictions of Roma Communities in Greece*. Compilation of cases presented to the Human Rights Committee 83rd Session March 14 to April 1, 2005, p.3, available at: <http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/index.php?sec=194&cid=428>

⁹ International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) in conversation with Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM).

and Intolerance (ECRI) notes with concern that some of these evictions are unlawful and are followed by destruction of the dwellings by bulldozers, despite the fact that all the personal possessions of the families remain there.¹⁰

The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) states that in the majority of cases of forced evictions affecting Roma communities in Greece the authorities fail to provide adequate compensation, reparation and resettlement to the victims.¹¹ In those cases where a resettlement plan is foreseen, the authorities often fail to implement such measures. Even when authorities commit themselves to resettlement and compensation, these measures only cover Greek Roma, who have legal residency status, and others, such as Albanian Roma, are excluded from these measures.

Greek municipal authorities used the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens as a pretext to carry out evictions of Roma settlements or to prevent any relocation of the Roma communities. Some of the cases related to the 2004 Olympic Games are still unresolved and Roma have not yet received any compensation for being evicted from their homes, even though there was a contractual obligation. According to the Greek National Commission for Human Rights:

“(...) it is also a fact that the holding of the Olympic Games has been an occasion for driving the Roma out of many regions. Local communities (very often untruthfully) invoked the need for the construction of sports facilities in order to get rid of the Roma, as was the case in Mexico in 1968.”¹²

While some Roma are permanently settled among the majority population, many Roma live in harsh conditions in temporary settlement outside of urban cities. These settlements are often not connected to sufficient infrastructure, such as decent roads. There is inadequate access to

¹⁰ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), *Third Report on Greece*, adopted on December 5, 2003, made public on June 8, 2004, available at: http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Greece/Greece_CBC_3.asp#TopOfPage

¹¹ COHRE, *Forced Evictions of Roma Communities in Greece*. Compilation of cases presented to Human Rights Committee 83rd Session March 14 to April 1, 2005, p.5, available at: <http://cm.greekhelsinki.gr/index.php?sec=194&cid=428>

¹² The National Commission for Human Rights, *The State of Roma in Greece*, 2004, available at: http://www.nchr.gr/category.php?category_id=99

running water and electricity, and there is often no connection to the local sewage system.¹³ Results from a study concerning facilities shows that 92% of those living in settlements do not have toilets and 100% of those living in settlements have no heating at all.¹⁴ Several Roma living in houses have also stated that they lack many of the facilities mentioned above. The term “houses” should not be interpreted literally since the “houses” in question are of various standards. Eighty-four per cent of Roma living in houses have to use either petrol or wood stoves since they do not benefit from central heating.¹⁵

The Roma have limited access to the public and private housing market. Many Roma families who try to rent or buy a house are unsuccessful due to prejudice. There have been several efforts by the Greek government to provide either temporary or permanent housing to the Roma but they have not been successful due to resistance at local level.¹⁶ Currently, the government is carrying out a Greece-wide program entitled “Integrated Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Roma people” that specifically foresees action to address the housing situation of Roma, but most municipalities remain reluctant to take concrete steps to improve housing conditions in Roma settlements.¹⁷ The government itself has noted that persistent prejudice at the level of local administration and among some members of the police force has hindered its efforts to improve Roma’s living conditions. Political will at the national level and particularly at the local level is crucial if Roma are to be provided with adequate accommodation. In the field of housing, the municipality is a key actor. It is important that there are national regulations and policies to the municipalities as to their obligations in the field of social housing for Roma.¹⁸

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights are in agreement that, although local authorities may be

¹³ European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) *Cleaning Operations-Excluding Roma in Greece*, 2003, p.83, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm/greeceE_2003.rtf

¹⁴ University of Ioannina, *Economic, Social, Cultural situation of the Gypsies in Greece*, Papakonstantinou, Giorgos, Vasileiadou, Maria, Pavli-Korre, Maria, Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Cults, Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, Section for Pedagogy, 1997-1998.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ IHF in conversation with GHM.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.26, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

responsible for particular violations of the rights of Roma, it is the state that is ultimately responsible for the implementation of its policies.¹⁹

Health

Available information indicates that Roma's health is inferior to that of the majority population, partly due to their living conditions. In addition, several Roma lack basic identity documents, making it impossible for them to claim health care and state social benefits. Many Roma do not trust the public health system and avoids hospitals, as a result morbidity and mortality rates are high among Roma. In respect of gender, Roma women face double discrimination and correspondingly low levels of access to health services. Roma women do not have access to family planning and infant mortality rates are significantly higher within the Roma community.²⁰ Roma suffer from diseases such as hepatitis to a higher extent than the majority population and their average life expectancy is lower than rest of the Greek population.²¹

Evidence of poor health for Roma children can be deduced from the low levels of vaccination and as a result, they are in danger of contracting diseases.²² Many children do not receive proper vaccinations because their parents do not fully understand the importance of such care. The Ministry of Health and Welfare is implementing a vaccination program with its target group being mostly Roma children, but so far this program has not yielded any concrete results in terms of the health status of Roma children. Many Roma are not aware of their social rights and therefore cannot benefit from social welfare. This was noted also by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child:

“Many children and their families from some distinct ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural groups, such as the Roma, are not fully aware of

¹⁹ OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, *Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*, April 7, 2000, p.118, available at: <http://www.osce.org>, and Council of Europe, report by Mr Alvaro Gil-Robles Commissioner for Human Rights, on his visit to the Hellenic Republic, June 2-5, 2002 Document CommDH (2002) 5, paragraph 23, July 17, 2002, available at: <http://www.commissioner.coe.int>.

²⁰ ERRC and GHM, *Cleaning Operations-Excluding Roma in Greece*, 2003, p. 15 and 94, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm/greeceE_2003.rtf

²¹ IHF in conversation with GHM, and ERRC and GHM, *Cleaning Operations-Excluding Roma in Greece*, 2003, p.95, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm/greeceE_2003.rtf

²² IHF in conversation with GHM.

their rights to social security and welfare and are consequently unable to claim such assistance.”²³

Employment and education

Roma face significant barriers in the labor market and in accessing gainful employment, and as a result, disproportionately high numbers are unemployed. In fact, there are indications that there is continued labor migration by Greek Roma to other European countries.²⁴ There are no accurate numbers concerning Roma employment and the Greek government does not take into consideration the different circumstances concerning Roma unemployment in their official statistics. Further, according to a number of reports, a significant proportion of Roma women are unemployed. There are governmental employment programs for Roma but as of this date their success has been limited and many have not yet been implemented.

As the majority of Roma living in settlements are lacking basic literacy and numerical skills, they cannot benefit from the current employment programs and must look for unskilled work.²⁵

Child labor and trafficking is a serious problem in the Roma community. The Greek government admits that the illegal employment of Roma children is an issue, and the Ministry of Public Order has concluded that:

“(…) the vast majority of minor beggars in our country are children of 7-12 years and, to a percentage of 95%, come from Albania; the other 5% are children of Greek Gypsies. It is safe to assume that the majority of the street children from Albania are also of Romani ethnic origin.”²⁶

²³ United Nations (UN), UN Doc CRC/C/15/Add.170, *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the rights of the Child: Greece*, 753-754 Session, January 16, 2002, available at: [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.15.Add.170.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.15.Add.170.En?OpenDocument)

²⁴ IHF in conversation with GHM.

²⁵ In 2004 it was revealed that certain Greek Roma were taken to the UK in order to work as flower pickers, where they lived under slavery conditions, available at: BBC Press Release http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/england/cornwall/3486453.stm

²⁶ Greek government's Reply to Observations of the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child, in *Implementation of the CRC, Additional and Updated Information Submitted by Greece in Connection with the Consideration of its Initial Report CRC/C/28/Add 17*, p.57, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/crc_grreplies.doc

According to a survey by UNICEF, 54% of the Roma parents questioned stated that their children are working. When asked to name the greatest danger facing their children, 60% of the Roma parents stated “getting arrested by the police”.²⁷

Roma face exclusion and discrimination in the education system. The levels of school enrolment and attendance of Roma children are low. A significant number of children enrolled at primary school are in the first grade and their drop-out rates remain high.²⁸ Illiteracy is estimated to be as high as 80-90% among Roma adults and approximately 80% among Roma children.²⁹ Most Roma children speak Romani and often know little Greek. However, there have been no attempts made by the government to introduce Romani language into schools.³⁰

Many Roma schoolchildren attend segregated schools with inadequate teaching. Further, ethnic Greek parents often prefer to send their children to schools far away from their residence rather than send them to the schools where Roma children are enrolled. These actions are creating segregated schools, attended only by Roma schoolchildren.

One of the main obstacles to the education of Roma children is the economic hardship experienced by many families. Many families cannot afford to send their children to school as they need the income the children can bring.³¹ In addition, Roma parents in settlements often lack educational background and can not give adequate support to their children’s education. There are several governmental Roma educational programs with different focus. Some have been more successful than others but information indicates that many of the measures taken by Greek authorities aimed directly at Roma schoolchildren have not been successful in integrating Roma in the education system or in raising their educational level. As mentioned (see page 8), the government has a Greece-wide program for the Roma entitled “Integrated Action Plan for the Social Integration of the Roma people”, which consists of Roma related

²⁷ The survey took place in Athens from March 6 to 13, 2001. The sample consisted of 2,434 parents whose children attend primary or secondary schools, available at: <http://www.unicef.gr>

²⁸ University of Ioannina, *Economic, Social, Cultural situation of the Gypsies in Greece*, Papakonstantinou, Giorgos, Vasileiadou, Maria, Pavli-Korre, Maria, Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Cults, Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, Section for Pedagogy, 1997-1998.

²⁹ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.75, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

³⁰ IHF in conversation with GHM.

³¹ Ibid.

education, employment and vocational training programs. However, several NGOs have criticized governmental policy towards Roma integration, seeing it as assimilationist.³²

Discrimination by authorities

Discrimination against Roma is not limited to discriminatory attitudes. Roma are more likely to be given prison sentences and to be victims of police abuse than the majority population.³³

According to ECRI:

“(...) Roma/Gypsies are often reported to be victims of excessive use of force in some cases resulting in death -- ill-treatment and verbal abuse on the part of the police. Discriminatory checks involving members of these groups are widespread. In most cases there is reported to be little investigation of these cases, and little transparency on the results of these investigations. Although most of these incidents do not generally result in a complaint being filed by the victim, when charges have been pressed the victims have reportedly in some cases been subjected to pressure to drop such charges.”³⁴

As mentioned earlier, abusive police raids on Roma settlements are commonplace. Greek Helsinki Monitor expresses concerns about ill-treatment of Roma by Greek public officials particularly in situations of forced evictions.³⁵ These raids are based on racial profiling of Roma by the police. Allegations from victims indicate that ill-treatment of Roma frequently includes physical and verbal abuse in police custody.³⁶ As mentioned by ECRI, most incidents of police violence appear to be ignored, or are only informally investigated by police, often failing to result in adequate disciplinary action against the police officers involved.³⁷

³² IHF in conversation with GHM.

³³ The issue of police treatment of Roma has also been the concern of NGOs. See for example the joint Amnesty International/IHF Report: *Greece: In the shadow of impunity. Ill treatment and the misuse of firearms*, 2002, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/countries/greece/ai_main_nophotos_24_09_02.doc

³⁴ ECRI, *Second Report on Greece*, adopted on December 10, 1999, made public on June 27, 2000, CRI(2000)32, paragraph 26, available at: http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/5_Archives/1-ECRI's_work/5_CBC_Second_reports/Greece/Greece_CBC_2.asp#TopOfPage

³⁵ IHF in conversation with GHM.

³⁶ ERRC and GHM, *Cleaning Operations-Excluding Roma in Greece*, 2003, p.14, available at: http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/organizations/ghm/greeceE_2003.rtf

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.15

ITALY

Roma in Italy are exposed to racism and abuse from authorities. They typically live in segregated camps in substandard living conditions, with lacking basic facilities and infrastructure. Mainly due to segregation, Roma children do not receive adequate education and anti-Roma attitudes are widespread in Italian society.

There are no accurate figures on the current numbers of Roma residing in Italy. Precise demographic data is not available due in large part to the stigma associated with the Roma identity and the reluctance of many Roma to identify themselves as such for official purposes.³⁸ Official statistics indicate that 130,000 Roma live in the country while local NGOs suggest a range from 105,000 to 160,000. Of these, 45,000 to 75,000 are immigrants or children of immigrants, mainly from Eastern Europe, particularly the former Yugoslavia.³⁹

Currently, there are widespread anti-Roma tendencies in Italy, propagated by media and politicians. Political campaigning, especially campaigning by right-wing parties such as the Lega Nord (Northern League), features explicit anti-Roma messages. Among others, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has expressed concern about the use of racism and xenophobia in Italian politics and the fact that social prejudice against Roma is exploited by harsh statements made by politicians.⁴⁰

The Roma are not recognized as an ethnic minority by the Italian government.⁴¹ According to ECRI, they remain the most disadvantaged ethnic minority group within Italy, due to discriminating political strategies.⁴² The sanctions provided by anti-discrimination legislation are weak and rarely enforced.⁴³ The existing definition of discrimination is not legally very

³⁸ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.9, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

³⁹ ERRC, *Campland, Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, No.9, 2000, p.16, available at:

<http://www.errc.org/db/00/0F/m0000000F.pdf>

⁴⁰ ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted on June 22, 2001 and made public on April 23, 2002, available at:

www.coe.int

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The Italian Helsinki Committee (IHC), Position paper, May 26, 2004.

⁴³ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.141, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

clear and there is no legislation to combat racial or ethnic discrimination.⁴⁴ Roma are mostly not aware of their rights or distrust authorities and believe that there are no effective remedies to redress discrimination in Italian society.

Housing

About one third of the total Roma population live in substandard housing conditions segregated from mainstream society.⁴⁵ They live in abandoned buildings or in overcrowded camps/ghettos of different sizes, which often lack basic infrastructure. The camps are either self-organized or officially authorized and administered. These camps came into being at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s when ten out of the twenty regions in Italy adopted laws aimed at “the protection of nomadic cultures”. These laws served to perpetuate the perception that all Roma are nomadic and formed the basis of the government’s inactivity in adopting effective integration and housing policies for the Roma minority.⁴⁶ ECRI states that the Roma camps are of particular concern in Italy:

“(…) ECRI is concerned that this situation of practical segregation of Roma/Gypsies in Italy appears to reflect a general approach of the Italian authorities which tend to consider Roma/Gypsies as nomads and wanting to live in camps. The representation of Roma/Gypsies as nomads also appears to be closely related to the general perception of the members of Roma/Gypsy communities of Italy as “foreigners” (…).”⁴⁷

The self-organized camps are often named “illegal” or “unauthorized”. Most authorized camps are guarded and surrounded by a wall or fence, measures that violate the freedom of movement of Roma living there. Most camps are on the outskirts of towns and cities, while others are in the middle of towns. There is not always a significant difference between the quality of life in an authorized and an unauthorized camp. Living conditions in Roma camps are generally poor and camps often lack adequate sewage systems and there is not always water or electricity. There are few examples of local authorities supplying water in

⁴⁴ Gerhard Baumgartner and Florian Freund, *Roma Policies, in Austria, the European Union, and Beyond*, Parliamentary Group of the Party of European Socialists at the European Parliament, 2003, p.43

⁴⁵ ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted on June 22, 2001 and made public on April 23, 2002, available at: www.coe.int

⁴⁶ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.140, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

⁴⁷ ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted June 22, 2001 and made public on April 22, 2002, available at: www.coe.int

unauthorized camps. Rarely, in authorized camps, there are standardized barracks or tents provided by municipal authorities.⁴⁸

“(...) the living conditions in camps inhabited by Roma/Gypsy families are extremely harsh, due to the lack of basic infrastructure and facilities, including access to energy, heating and lighting, sanitation as well as washing facilities and refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services.”⁴⁹

Discrimination by local authorities and the police is common, as is hostility from the surrounding population. Roma who live in self-organized camps are frequently subjected to intrusion, abusive raids and eviction undertaken by law enforcement officials. As a result of growing anti-foreigner sentiment and hostility toward Roma, the frequency of abusive raids and evictions conducted by police and other authorities has increased in recent years. Authorities raid most frequently late at night or early in the morning. Such raids include destruction of property and dwellings belonging to Roma while alternate adequate housing is not offered. Raids are conducted for different reasons and they are for the most part violent.⁵⁰

Some local municipalities have started to integrate Roma families into public housing, declaring their opposition to camps. Other municipalities have pledged to offer rent-free, prefabricated housing with toilets, free water and electricity to Roma families who send their children to school.⁵¹ However, Roma have rarely been involved in the elaboration of integration programs and, as a result, measures have often not corresponded to actual needs among Roma.

Health

There is information indicating that Roma's health is inferior to that of the majority population. Poverty, lack of basic sanitary facilities in camps and discrimination in the provision of health services have led to high levels of communicable disease such as

⁴⁸ ERRC, *Campland, Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, No.9, 2000, p.16, available at: <http://www.errc.org/db/00/0F/m0000000F.pdf>

⁴⁹ ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted June 22, 2001 and made public on April 23, 2002, available at: www.coe.int

⁵⁰ ERRC, *Campland, Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, No.9, 2000, p.16, available at: <http://www.errc.org/db/00/0F/m0000000F.pdf>

⁵¹ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.140, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

tuberculosis and hepatitis.⁵² Infant mortality rates are significantly higher within the Roma community.⁵³ Moreover, as camps are often located near motorways and busy streets, there are frequent reports of accidents involving cars and Roma children.⁵⁴ The health care system has been unable to take into consideration the special needs of the Roma population and the Roma are not sufficiently aware of their social rights. Further, Roma's fear of police raids and evictions is destructive to their psychological well-being.⁵⁵

Employment and education

The unemployment rate among Roma is high – few Roma have regular work. They are largely excluded from the employment market, on the one hand, due to prejudiced attitudes and discrimination on the parts of employers, on the other, due to their low level of education and professional experience. Government programs aimed at promoting employment of Roma have yet to make any marked impact, even though examples of good practice do exist. Employment is the key to poverty eradication and further social inclusion.⁵⁶

A large number of Roma children in Italy do not have access to adequate education since they live segregated in political, economic and cultural isolation. Roma children mostly only attend primary school, with very low enrolment rate and irregular attendance.⁵⁷ Very few take up secondary education. Segregation, poverty, eviction and the destruction of Roma settlements by police make school attendance difficult. Moreover, Roma are often too poor to send their children to school since the children have to contribute to the family income. Many Roma children cannot receive education because their camps are located too far from schools and proper infrastructure, and no transportation has been arranged for them. Often, Roma children cannot register in school since they lack the relevant documents for school registration, such

⁵² European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.2, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

⁵³ ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted June 22, 2001 and made public on April 23, 2002, available at: www.coe.int

⁵⁴ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.140, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.2, available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

⁵⁷ ERRC, *Campland, Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, No.9, 2000, p.49, available at: <http://www.errc.org/db/00/0F/m0000000F.pdf>

as civic registration and medical certificates.⁵⁸ In addition, the support from Roma parents is limited since they often lack educational background and mistrust the school system because they believe that it is aimed at assimilating their children into majority society. Roma children who attend normal schools often face prejudice from non-Roma parents, bullying by non-Roma children and stereotyping by teachers and school administrators. As a result, many Roma children do not attend school at all, or drop out at an early age.

There are governmental programs and measures to integrate Roma children into the mainstream of the Italian school system. For example, the Italian government has appointed “mediators” to manage the relationship between local communities and the Roma. There are two kinds of mediators; cultural mediators who assist in interaction between the schools and Roma and intercultural mediators involved in social integration activities.⁵⁹ However, the role of the mediator remains unclear and the impartiality of mediators remains a subject to controversy because Roma and school institutions have different expectations as to their role. Often the institution sees the mediator as an assistant who can handle Roma problems and Roma sees the mediator as an ally against authorities.

Few Italian schools have adopted adequate strategies to assist disadvantaged children and foreign pupils who can neither speak nor understand Italian. What is more, few Italian programs aimed at Roma education have been designed to overcome the poverty of Roma families. The success of the educational programs has been very dependent of the initiative and support of individual teachers.⁶⁰ Some municipal authorities have attempted to transfer responsibility for the education of Roma children to NGOs, but through this form of education Roma children would not receive official grades, and thus would not qualify for secondary school diplomas.⁶¹

The practical separation of Roma communities from mainstream social and political spheres is reflected in all fields of life.⁶² Segregation makes it impossible for Roma to integrate into society. Measures should be implemented to overcome the practical segregation at all levels

⁵⁸ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.159, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Gerhard Baumgartner and Florian Freund, *Roma Policies, in Austria, the European Union, and Beyond*. Parliamentary Group of the Party of European Socialists at the European Parliament, 2003, p.44

and improvements of their living conditions are of major importance in order to change the current situation.

Police abuse toward Roma

Roma in Italy suffer abuse at the hands of police. Physical abuse usually takes place in custody or upon arrest and are seldom reported. Few police officers have been disciplined or prosecuted for abuse against Roma. This is because Roma do not report abuse and because authorities often do not take effective measures to investigate and prosecute complaints.⁶³ Instances of violence against Roma by non-state actors – including episodes of community violence – have been documented. Roma often do not report such cases to police because of distrust of authorities, lack of knowledge about their rights and fear of further harassment. Violations often remain without judicial remedy.⁶⁴

⁶² ECRI, *Second report on Italy*, adopted June 22, 2001 and made public on April 23, 2002, available at: www.coe.int

⁶³ ERRC, *Campland, Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Country Report Series, No.9, 2000, p.49, available at: <http://www.errc.org/db/00/0F/m0000000F.pdf>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

SWEDEN

Roma in Sweden suffer from discrimination and institutional racism. They live segregated and have limited access to the public and private housing market. Roma children rarely benefit from education adapted to their special needs and the drop-out rate among Roma at the upper secondary level is high. Many Roma have experienced hostile attitudes by authorities and do not feel accepted in Swedish society.

Sweden has the largest number of Roma in the Nordic Countries. The Swedish Roma population is estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 and the Traveler community numbers about the same.⁶⁵

Currently, most Roma are marginalized in society. They suffer from prejudice and racism and are often exposed to discriminatory treatment by municipalities, which has fostered widespread mistrust towards authorities on their part.⁶⁶

Although the Swedish government is a strong supporter of human rights and the situation of Roma in Sweden is comparatively better than that of Roma in most other European countries, the situation of the Roma population remains a source of concern.^h

Housing

Lack of adequate housing and poor living conditions are central problems that the Swedish Roma face, mainly due to discrimination. Roma experience problems in accessing the public housing market and they suffer from discriminatory treatment by private housing companies and landlords because of their ethnicity. As a result, it is difficult for Roma to settle on a permanent basis. A recent survey showed that almost 50% of Roma have been subjected to insults and harassment by neighbors.⁶⁷ Many Roma often live in overcrowded apartments in

⁶⁵ Malmö museum estimates the Roma community to be 25,000 and equally as many Travelers, see: *A report about Malmö Museum's work concerning Roma culture in Sweden*, p.10, 2004. The Roma Youth Organization (RUF) estimates the Roma community to be 35,000, available at: <http://www.rufs.org/index.php?p=12>. Stockholm's Integration Authority (Stockholms Integrationsförvaltning, closed down January 1, 2005) stated that there are 40,000 Roma in Sweden, information available at: <http://www.integration.nu/minoriteter/romer/>

⁶⁶ Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering), *Discrimination against Romanies in Sweden- a report on the DO project in the years of 2002 and 2003 on counteracting and forestalling ethnic discrimination against Romanies*, 2004, p.9, available at: <http://www.do.se/o.o.i.s?id=1575>

⁶⁷ Stockholm School of Social Studies, results from a survey on how 150 Roma experience discrimination. The survey was presented by Anna Lakatos and Anna Forsberg as a graduation paper with the title *Romernas*

relatively segregated housing areas along with persons of immigrant origin, where very few Swedes of the majority population live. Homelessness and evictions are not uncommon in Roma communities. Poor living conditions make it hard for the Roma to integrate in society.

Health

Between the two World Wars, sterilization was used as a tool of public policy in Sweden and several governmental investigations concerning “racial biology” were carried out. Numerous Roma women were subjected to coercive sterilization.⁶⁸ Roma were defined as “an undesirable social phenomenon” and were expected to “disappear” as the Swedish welfare state progressed.⁶⁹ In the late 1990s, the Swedish government publicly acknowledged the abuses and some of the victims of forced sterilization have received compensation.⁷⁰ However, Roma as a group suffered extensive trauma as a result of the abuses, which has contributed to Roma women still distrusting the Swedish medical care system.

Further, Roma distrust the Swedish medical care system because they feel discriminated against by hospital staff and feel that they are given inadequate treatment. As a result, Roma often avoid going to hospital unless they have serious, acute health problems, a fact that contributes to their generally poor health status. Available information indicates that Roma’s health is inferior to that of the majority population. They suffer from diseases such as hepatitis to a higher extent than the majority population and often lack knowledge about nutrition and tend to eat unhealthy.⁷¹ In addition, many Roma children have not been properly vaccinated because their parents lack sufficient information of the importance of such care.⁷² Some government programs have been developed to inform Roma about the health system and health in general but it is too early to evaluate the outcome.

upplevelese av diskriminering i Sverige. The survey indicates that Swedish Roma feel discriminated against in a high degree and also implies that Roma have a stronger feeling of being discriminated against than people from other groups presented in studies from the Center for research on immigrants (Centrum för invandrarforskning), 2003, for further information see: http://www.do.se/upload/do/filer/roma_rapport.pdf

⁶⁸ Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering), *Discrimination against Romanies in Sweden- a report on the DO project in the years of 2002 and 2003 on counteracting and forestalling ethnic discrimination against Romanies*, 2004, p.8, available at: <http://www.do.se/o.o.i.s?id=1575>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ The amount of the compensation was SEK 175,000 (almost 1,900 Euros), *Compensation from the government to victims of sterilizations, in some cases (Ersättning av staten till steriliserade i vissa fall)*. Bill of the Swedish Social Ministry, 1998/99:71, 1999, p.1, available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/394/a/21482>

⁷¹ In conversation with Allan Schwartz, Vice Chairman for Roma International, a NGO working with Roma rights in Sweden, April 20, 2005, and the former Swedish Interior Ministry (Inrikesdepartementet), *Romer i Sverige – tillsammans i förändring*, 1997, p.36, available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/19/37/5fd12a9c.pdf>

Employment and education

Roma in Sweden are marginalized in the labor market and in the education system. Only few Roma have regular jobs, on the one hand, due to prejudiced attitudes and discrimination on the part of employers, on the other, due to their low level of education and professional training. There are indications that racial discrimination is a powerful force preventing access of Roma to the labor market. According to the Swedish Helsinki Committee (SHC), many Roma are not called to job interviews because of their surnames, a problem which cannot effectively be combated under legislation in force. Existing structures, demands and terms for employment are adjusted to the majority population. Many Roma have failed to enter the labor market, and the labor market has failed to receive them.⁷³

Roma children are exposed to discrimination and insults in the school system due to their ethnicity. Many Roma children hide their ethnicity in order to avoid discrimination and other problems such as bullying. They do not receive enough support by teachers, who often take underachievement for granted from Roma children.⁷⁴ As many Roma parents are poorly educated and some are even illiterate, they are not in a position to adequately support their children in school. Roma parents are also often worried that their children will be assimilated and lose their Roma identity when going to school. Many Roma cannot see the future benefits from education and according to the SHC several Roma children feel that there are no rewards for school efforts.

Most Roma children are not offered education adapted to their special needs, many cannot follow instruction in Swedish and insufficient resources are being spent on teaching in Romani.⁷⁵ Few Roma youth finish comprehensive school with sufficiently good grades to qualify for higher education and most do not continue to study after comprehensive school.⁷⁶ In addition, the number of Roma children who drop out from upper secondary school is high.⁷⁷

⁷² The former Swedish Interior Ministry (Inrikesdepartementet), *Romer i Sverige – tillsammans i förändring*, 1997, p.35, available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/19/37/5fd12a9c.pdf>

⁷³ The former Swedish Interior Ministry (Inrikesdepartementet), *Romer i Sverige – tillsammans i förändring*, 1997, p.39, available at: <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/19/37/5fd12a9c.pdf>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ In the Swedish school system comprehensive school enrolls children in the ages between 6 or 7 to 15. The Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), *Roma and the Swedish School (Romer och den svenska skolan)*, 1999, p.5, available at: <http://www.skolverket.se>

⁷⁷ The Swedish upper secondary school is non-compulsory and enrolls students in the ages between 16 to 18 or 19.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has pointed to the disadvantaged status of Roma children in education and their marginalized position in the Swedish school system:

“Less than half the Roma children entitled to bilingual Romany/Swedish education actually benefit from this entitlement, reportedly because many schools do not inform them of their rights. There is also a lack of Romani teachers. Provisions of educational material for the Roma in their own language and also material for the whole population on the Roma culture and language, is insufficient.”⁷⁸

The Swedish government has launched several programs to promote Roma integration in the educational system in recent years, but these programs have not proven entirely successful e.g. because of lack of sufficient resources. Sometimes the integration programs become part of the problem themselves because they have treated Roma as passive victims and have attempted to promote integration of Roma in the school system without including the Roma themselves in the process.⁷⁹ As a result, the programs have created feelings of forced assimilation instead of encouraging integration.

There have been some positive actions to integrate the Roma children marginalized in the school system into mainstream schools in different municipalities but such actions largely depend on the initiative of individual teachers and their personal engagement. A more fundamental change in Swedish educational policies toward Roma is of major importance to effectively promote integration of exposed Roma in the country’s school system, and further, to integrate exposed Roma in society.⁸⁰ Also, as the SHC has stressed, in order to effectively counteract racism and prejudice against Roma students, it would be important to intensify efforts to promote knowledge and understanding of Roma among the majority population.

Discrimination by authorities and majority society

Swedish Roma face discrimination in terms of access to goods and services. They are frequently denied entry to shops, restaurants and hotels. Twenty-seven percent of Roma said

⁷⁸ ECRI, *Second report on Sweden*, adopted on June 28, 2002 and made public on April 15, 2003, available at: <http://www.coe.int>

⁷⁹ The Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering), *Discrimination against Romanies in Sweden- a report on the DO project in the years of 2002 and 2003 on counteracting and forestalling ethnic discrimination against Romanies*, 2004, p.12, available at: <http://www.do.se/o.o.i.s?id=1575>

in a survey from year 2003 that they have been refused entry into shops and 40% say they have been refused entry into restaurants.⁸¹

In addition, Roma are being discriminated against when they are in contact with authorities and many social workers reportedly have stereotypical attitudes towards them.⁸² Many Roma feel that police are prejudiced against them and lack understanding of their culture.⁸³ According to a survey, 70% of Swedish Roma have no or little confidence in police.⁸⁴

Few Roma file complaints about discrimination, mainly because they lack awareness of existing protection or distrust the authorities. There have been some changes in this respect after the adoption in 2003 of legislation that extended the powers of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination to bring discrimination cases to court, thereby improving remedies for Roma and other victims of ethnically motivated discrimination.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ In conversation with Allan Schwartz, April 20, 2005

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The Ombudsman against ethnic discrimination (Ombudsmannen mot etnisk diskriminering), *Discrimination against Romanies in Sweden- a report on the DO project in the years of 2002 and 2003 on counteracting and forestalling ethnic discrimination against Romanies*, 2004, p.26, available at: <http://www.do.se/o.o.i.s?id=1575>

⁸³ In conversation with Allan Schwarz, April 20, 2005

⁸⁴ Results from the graduate paper *Romernas upplevelse av diskriminering i Sverige*, 2003

⁸⁵ Lag (2003:307) om förbud mot diskriminering (Law concerning prohibition against discrimination), available at: http://www.do.se/upload/do/lagar_osv/lag_dfl.doc This law was proven effective in a recent case where a Roma woman filed a discrimination complaint. She and her husband were denied access to a sports/recreation facility during Easter 2004. The case recently ended with reconciliation and damage for discrimination from the owner of the facility of SEK 100,000 (approximately 10,000 Euros).

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The Roma/Traveler situation in the UK is worrying for a number of reasons. Public attitudes toward Roma/Travelers are hostile and members of these groups are subjected to discrimination in many areas of society. They do not have access to sufficient education and have poor health status. In a recent development, members of the conservative Tory party have encourage negative attitudes against Roma/Travelers and an anti-Roma/Traveler campaign has been launched by media, with demands being made to reverse certain parts of domestic human rights law.

Estimations of the number of Roma/Travelers in the UK are many and varied.⁸⁶ NGOs estimate that the figure is between 100,000 and 150,000, whilst government estimations are much lower.⁸⁷

Many traveling Roma/Travelers live in substandard housing conditions, due to that there are few sites that have been officially designated as encampments for nomadic Roma/Traveler families. They are being subjected to discrimination and prejudice from media, politicians and the majority population.

Housing

Many Roma/Travelers have poor housing conditions. Around one-third of all Roma/Travelers in the UK live on unauthorized roadside encampments.⁸⁸ A major reason for this pattern is that there are few sites that have been officially designated as encampments for nomadic Roma/Traveler families.

Many of the unauthorized encampments are located on undesirable sites, such as areas next to railways or refuse dumps. Up to 30% of Roma/Travelers at roadside encampments have no or

⁸⁶ It is important to know that a large proportion of Roma/Travelers are sedentary and the definition in this report does not exclude those who are settled or those who are presently living in houses.

⁸⁷ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.206, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

⁸⁸ Buckingham Chilterns University College, *It's my Land and I'm doing no harm*, Dr. Margret Greenfields, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy/Sociology, Faculty of Health. 2003, p.12

limited access to clean water and many lack access to chemical or water lavatories.⁸⁹ Forced evictions are common from these unauthorized encampments.⁹⁰

Health

The Department of Health commissioned a research in 2004 on the health situation of Roma/Travelers, based on the premise that they are arguably the most socially excluded group in society. Currently, access to medical care is limited for those families who are not permanently settled, as possession of a stable address is generally a condition for registration with a General Practitioner (GP). GPs can accept Roma/Travelers as “temporary patients” but many GPs will not accept nomadic families as patients on these terms.⁹¹ Many Roma/Travelers do not seek contact with the health care system when they are in need of medical treatment because they fear to be treated in a prejudiced way.

Poor living conditions and discriminating attitudes on the part of health care practitioners have a detrimental impact on the health status of un-settled Roma/Travelers. High rates of heart disease, diabetes and bronchial conditions are widespread among the Roma/Traveler population, leading to premature morbidity and mortality.⁹² The infant mortality rate for Roma/Travelers is around 1.5 times higher than among housed members of the population.⁹³ The life expectancy for Roma/Travelers is lower than among any other ethnic group in the UK.⁹⁴

Authorities have taken some measures to improve access of Roma/Travelers to the health care system. However, research conducted by the Department of Health has shown that the needs of Roma/Travelers are not being met through current plans and programs. More effective methods are necessary not only to provide Roma/Travelers better access to adequate healthcare but also to raise awareness among health professionals about their special

⁸⁹ Buckingham Chilterns University College, *It's my Land and I'm doing no harm*, Dr. Margret Greenfields, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy/Sociology, Faculty of Health, 2003, p.12

⁹⁰ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2004, p.25, available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

⁹¹ Buckingham Chilterns University College, *It's my Land and I'm doing no harm*, Dr. Margret Greenfields, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy/Sociology, Faculty of Health, 2003, p.12

⁹² The Department of Health Inequalities, Health Research Initiative Project 121/7500, *The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England*, 2004, p.6, available at: <http://www.shcf.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/55/71/GT%20report%20summary.pdf>

⁹³ Buckingham Chilterns University College, *It's my Land and I'm doing no harm*, Dr. Margret Greenfields, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy/Sociology, Faculty of Health. 2003, p.12

⁹⁴ Ibid.

situation.⁹⁵ When developing plans to improve the current situation, special attention should be paid to defining clear areas of responsibility and accountability so as to remedy the current lack of central guidance and the low priority given to Roma/Travelers' health at the local level.⁹⁶

Employment and education

Roma/Travelers are marginalized in the labor market and in the education system. Unemployment is high and there are no effective programs to tackle the problems. Only few Roma/Travelers have regular jobs, due to prejudiced attitudes and discrimination on the part of employers and their low levels of education and working experience. The Commission for Racial Equality has voiced concern that Roma/Travelers are being unlawfully discriminated against when applying for jobs, often forcing them to hide their ethnic identity.⁹⁷

Many Roma/Travelers feel that programs developed by the authorities to promote their employment are discriminatory and insensitive to their special needs. In some cases, unemployed Roma/Travelers are unable to benefit from social welfare because of low levels of literacy, for example they have insufficient literacy skills to complete required applications, and lack of a permanent address which is a requirement to benefit from social welfare.⁹⁸

Roma/Traveler pupils are the group most at risk in the education system and they are not receiving formal and adequate education.⁹⁹ There are many factors combined to produce this outcome. First, Roma/Traveler children suffer from discrimination, prejudice and bullying in school environment,¹⁰⁰ with racist bullying acknowledged as a major factor in school exclusion.¹⁰¹ Second, several schools have an ambivalent attitude towards the legitimacy of

⁹⁵ The Department of Health Inequalities, Health Research Initiative Project 121/7500, *The Health Status of Gypsies & Travellers in England*, 2004, p.2, available at:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/02/55/71/GT%20report%20summary.pdf>

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.12

⁹⁷ The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is a publicly funded NGO that monitors implementation of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination, for example by undertaking formal investigations into cases of alleged discrimination. It may also make recommendations, which, however, are not binding. For more information about CRE, see: <http://www.cre.gov.uk>

⁹⁸ CRE, *Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE, 2004 -2007*, 2004, p.12, available at:

<http://www.cre.gov.uk/>

⁹⁹ The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), *Provision and support for Traveller pupils*, 2003, p.21, available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk

¹⁰⁰ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.206, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.255

the Roma/Traveler pupils' minority ethnic status, as a consequence of which Roma/Traveler pupils are unwilling to state their ethnic identity. This, in turn, limits the schools' ability to meet the needs of Roma/Traveler pupils within the context of race equality. Third, parents often lack educational background and can not give adequate support to their children's education.

Roma/Traveler pupils have worst attendance profile of any minority ethnic group in the UK.¹⁰² It is estimated, that only 60% of primary aged Roma/Traveler children attend school and less than 20% of secondary aged.¹⁰³

Moreover, the average achievement rate for Roma/Traveler pupils is well below the national average. The situation in the key area of primary education is particularly worrying, with primary-age Roma/Traveler pupils being frequently at least one year behind their peers and, in many cases, more than this at whatever age they enter primary school.¹⁰⁴ The achieving weaknesses are most evident in reading and writing, which results in a relatively high level of illiteracy among Roma/Traveler children.¹⁰⁵ For example, in 2001 only 33% of Roma/Traveler pupils, age of seven, gained Level 2 and above in reading and writing and only 44% did so in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1.¹⁰⁶ In comparison, the national average is respectively 84%, 86% and 91%.¹⁰⁷ At the end of Key Stage 1 most British children are expected to achieve Level 2 in the national curriculum tests.

There are marked differences in access to school between permanently settled Roma/Travelers and those who live in unauthorized encampments. In 2001, on county level school places were found for only 25% of Roma/Traveler pupils of primary age who lived on unauthorized encampments, a result of the fact that schools refuse, due to lack of resources and bureaucratic obstacles, to accept Roma students from unauthorized camps¹⁰⁸ Many local

¹⁰² The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), *Provision and support for Traveller pupils*, 2003, p.5, available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.10

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.17

¹⁰⁵ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.211, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

¹⁰⁶ The British school system is divided into: Key Stage 1 for five to seven year olds, Key Stage 2 for seven to eleven year olds (primary school children) and Key Stage 3 for eleven to fourteen year olds (high school children).

¹⁰⁷ Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), *Provision and support for Traveller pupils*, 2003, p.14, available at: www.ofsted.gov.uk

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.10

authorities have failed to adopt adequate policies to facilitate access to school of Roma/Traveler children. In addition, Roma/Travelers are often segregated and excluded from mainstream education – some schools even flatly refuse to admit Roma/Traveler children.¹⁰⁹ Segregation takes place formally and informally. Entire schools have been established for Roma/Travelers, designed to keep the children excluded from mainstream schools and education.¹¹⁰ There is a growing trend in the UK among Roma/Traveler families to educate their children at home, in particular at the secondary level. The quality of such education is very uneven, this concern home education in general, and gives rise to serious questions as to whether the pupils genuinely profit from this form of education.

Recently, there have been improvements concerning attendance rates and there are examples of programs and projects that aim to promote Roma/Traveler children's access to school and the quality of their education. The programs are both governmental and voluntarily. Many of these programs try to make the British school system more inclusive and responsive to variety.

Although educational policy in the UK is the only field that specifically includes Roma in the process of monitoring and program evaluation, the achievements of Roma pupils in school is in marked contrast to the achievements of all other minority ethnic groups.¹¹¹ There is an urgent need for the authorities to study and analyze thoroughly the possible reasons for low attendance rates and underachievement, including institutionalized racism. Moreover, Roma/Travelers should be better included in the decision-making process concerning their own integration, specifically in the educational sector. Effective measures are necessary to ensure that Roma/Traveler children are able to obtain the knowledge necessary for integration and equal participation in society.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.211, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

¹¹⁰ The government maintained recently a "Traveler-only" school in Belfast. Save the Children, *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, 2001, p.211, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>,

¹¹¹ Department for Education and Skills, Ethnic monitoring PLASC data, 2004, available at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk>

¹¹² CRE, *Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE, 2004 -2007*, 2004, p.12, available at: <http://www.cre.gov.uk/>

Discrimination by the media and politicians

Parts of the media openly express racist attitudes towards Roma/Travelers, and racism appears to be institutionalized in many sectors of public life. Some politicians apparently think it is acceptable to make offensive and negative public comments regarding Roma/Travelers.¹¹³ Prejudice against Roma/Travelers increasingly came to expression in the run-up to the recent UK general election, particularly in the campaigning of Tory leader Michael Howard.

In March 2005, the daily newspaper the *Sun*, a tabloid well-known for its sensationalist reports, launched a campaign for a “Gypsy-free” UK.¹¹⁴ The campaign, that involved numerous articles, was a reaction to Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott's announcement that all local councils must now take account of Travelers' needs in their local housing plans, and identify land for them to buy and develop. Papers such as the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* accused the government of treating Roma/Travelers more favorably than the rest of the population.¹¹⁵ The *Sun* has pledged a reversal of human rights law in order to make planning laws more equal for all. The campaign has been presented in the form of a coupon which readers are urged to clip out and mail to Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. The campaign is misleading and likely to cause discriminatory behavior against Roma/Travelers.¹¹⁶ It plays on misconceptions about purpose and qualities of human rights law and in doing so increases prejudice and a racist atmosphere.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Including a statement made by former Home Secretary Jack Straw in an interview on Radio West Midlands, July 22, 1999: “*Many of these so-called Travellers think it is perfectly OK for them to cause mayhem in an area, to go burgling, thieving, breaking into vehicles, causing all kinds of other trouble including defecating in the doorways of firms and so on, and, getting away with it, then their behavior degenerates.*” Cited in *Denied a Future?: The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children*, report by Save the Children, 2001, p.295, available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/index.jsp?flash=true>

¹¹⁴ The *Sun* defends its campaign by saying that it is not racist, but that the paper is speaking for millions of householders who have had, or face having, their communities “ruined” by illegal camps. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4337281.stm>

¹¹⁵ Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4337281.stm>

¹¹⁶ The *Sun*'s campaign, launched with an editorial on March 9, 2005, and repeated in subsequent editions, states:

- 1.) *We demand an end to retrospective planning consent given by council to gipsy camps.*
- 2.) *We demand that planning laws apply equally to everyone and not be waived to benefit a minority of travellers.*
- 3.) *We demand a reversal of Human Rights law that grants gypsies privileges and immunity that hard-working citizens do not have.*

¹¹⁷ ERRC complaint to the Chairman of Press Complaints Commission, concerning the *Sun* campaign, March 23, 2005 available at: <http://www.errc.org>

Referring to the *Sun* campaign, MediaWise rightly stated:¹¹⁸

*"(...) they take the people who they know they can get away with being offensive about, because they know no one will defend them, and they use that to try to overturn human rights legislation."*¹¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, members of the conservative Tory party has helped mobilize anti-Roma attitudes as part of the campaign leading up to the May 2005 parliamentary elections. Tory Leader Michael Howard has recently publicly been calling for active measures to disband illegal settlements and a review of human rights legislation to ensure that it does not contradict with laws against unauthorized land development.¹²⁰ The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has voiced concern about the negative tone in the public debate concerning Roma/Travelers in the UK:

*"Episodes of racial attacks and harassments against asylum seekers, notably Roma/Gypsies, demonstrate, in ECRI's opinion, some of the dangers which the increasingly negative climate of opinion can bring about. Apart from the problem of the occurrence of concrete manifestations of violence or intolerance, however, ECRI considers that it is unacceptable for politicians to direct the general public's feeling of insecurity on one specific group of persons (...)"*¹²¹

¹¹⁸ MediaWise is the new name for PressWise, a NGO that promotes for the benefit of the public compliance with ethical standards of conduct and with the law by journalists, broadcasters and all others engaged in or responsible for the media, in the UK, and elsewhere. For more information about MediaWise, see:

<http://www.presswise.org.uk/>

¹¹⁹ Mike Jempson of MediaWise, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4337281.stm>

¹²⁰ *Tory's Five Point Plan includes the following:*

- 1.) *Review of the Human Rights Act to ensure it does not clash with laws against unauthorized land development.*
- 2.) *New powers for councils to remove illegal caravans and the option of larger court fines.*
- 3.) *Local authorities to be able to purchase land compulsorily where there is a continuing breach of a Stop Notice.*
- 4.) *Revised guidance to police on traveler trespass and criminal or anti-social behavior on traveler sites.*
- 5.) *Empowering local people to decide on the location of traveler sites.*

¹²¹ ECRI, *Second report on the United Kingdom*, adopted on June 16, 2000, and made public on April 3, 2001, available at: <http://www.coe.int>